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POSTSCRIPT TO WATERGATE

ANNCR: A NEW BOOK AND A MOVIE ABOUT THE WATERGATE AFFAIR HAV JUST BEEN RELEASED IN THE UNITED STATES. V.O.A. NEWS ANALYST RONALD J. DUNLAVEY DISCUSSES THIS DEVELOPMENT:

VOICE: THE NEW BOOK -- LATEST IN THE GROWING WATERGATE COLLECTION -- IS BY BOB WOODWARD AND CARL BERNSTEIN, THE SAME TWO REPORTERS FOR THE WASHINGTON POST WHO WROTE THE ORIGINAL WATERGATE EXPOSE THREE YEARS AGO. IT'S CALLED "THE FINAL DAYS," AND IT IS -- SAY THE ADVANCE NOTICES -- BASED ON "PREVIOUSLY UNREPORTED MATERIAL." THE MOVIE IS CALLED "ALL THE PRESIDENT'S MEN," AND IT IS BASED ON AN EARLIER BOOK BY WOODWARD AND BERNSTEIN WHICH TELLS HOW THEY CAME TO UNCOVER AND WRITE THE STORY OF WATERGATE.

BOTH ARE BOUND TO CAUSE A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF CONTROVERSY -- ESPECIALLY THE NEW BOOK. IT CONTAINS, IN HARROWING DETAIL, AN ACCOUNT OF HOW PRESIDENT NIXON IS SAID TO HAVE BEHAVED DURING THE LAST YEAR BEFORE HIS RESIGNATION IN AUGUST OF NINETEEN SEVENTY-FOUR. IT DOES NOT MAKE THE FORMER PRESIDENT LOOK VERY GOOD. HE IS PORTRAYED AS DRINKING EXCESSIVELY, AS CAUGHT IN SPELLS OF UNCONTROLLABLE WEEPING, AND AS BEHAVING GENERALLY IN AN UNBALANCED MANNER. HIS ASSOCIATES AND MEMBERS OF HIS FAMILY ARE PICTURED AS BEING EXTREMELY DISTURBED -- AMONG OTHER POSSIBILITIES -- THAT MR. NIXON MIGHT COMMIT SUICIDE, OR MAKE SOME IRRATIONAL DECISION HARMFUL TO THE PUBLIC INTEREST.

OBVIOUSLY THIS IS BEST-SELLING MATERIAL. BUT THE BOOK HAS A FEW PROBLEMS. FOR ONE THING, SOME OF THE INCIDENTS IT RELATES ARE SO BIZARRE THAT THEY STRAIN THE IMAGINATION AND LEAVE THE

READER ASKING: "DID THIS REALLY HAPPEN?" ANOTHER IS THE STYLE, WHICH BORDERS ON THE FICTIONAL, CONVEYING NOT ONLY THE WORDS BUT ALSO THE THOUGHTS OF THE PEOPLE INVOLVED, AND RAISING INEVITABLE QUESTIONS ABOUT ACCURACY. SECRETARY OF STATE KISSINGER'S REACTION IS THAT THE BOOK CONTAINS GOSSIP, INACCURACIES, DISTORTIONS AND MISREPRESENTATIONS. THE NEWSPAPER "CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR" ACCUSES THE AUTHORS OF "TAKING A NOVELISTIC APPROACH TO A TRAGIC TIME," AND COLUMNIST WILLIAM SAFIRE, IN THE NEW YORK TIMES, ARGUES THAT THEY ARE GUILTY OF "PUTTING QUOTATION MARKS AROUND REMARKS THEIR SECONDARY SOURCES NEVER HEARD SPOKEN." ANOTHER QUESTION THAT HAS BEEN RAISED IS WHETHER THE BOOK VIOLATES NORMAL CANONS OF GOOD TASTE IN DEALING WITH THE INTIMATE DETAILS IT DESCRIBES. IN DEFENSE OF THE AUTHORS, IT IS ARGUED THAT THIS IS THE FREE PRESS IN ACTION, THAT THIS MATERIAL IS LEGITIMATE NEWS, THAT THE AMERICAN PEOPLE HAVE A RIGHT TO KNOW THE FACTS -- ESPECIALLY IN SUCH AN IMPORTANT MATTER -- AND THAT ANYONE WHO FEELS HIMSELF UNJUSTLY PORTRAYED OR MISQUOTED HAS RECOURSE TO THE LIBEL LAWS. BUT THERE HAS BEEN CONSIDERABLE ADVERSE PUBLIC REACTION, IF LETTERS WRITTEN TO THE WASHINGTON POST ARE ANY CRITERION.

THERE'S BEEN SOME SPECULATION THAT THE BOOK AND MOVIE MIGHT CAUSE WATERGATE TO BE RESURRECTED AS AN ISSUE IN THIS YEAR'S PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION. SO FAR, HOWEVER, NONE OF THE CANDIDATES HAS SHOWN ANY SIGN OF MAKING WATERGATE A MAJOR ISSUE -- POSSIBLY BECAUSE NO NEW GROUND HAS BEEN BROKEN AS FAR AS THE BASIC FACTS OF THE CASE ARE CONCERNED. AND THE CAMPAIGN MANAGER OF ONE DEMOCRATIC PARTY CONTENDER HAS BEEN QUOTED AS SAYING ABOUT WATERGATE: "AS A NATION, WE SURVIVED AND LEARNED A LESSON.

I DON'T THINK THE VOTERS WANT TO LOOK BACK." OBVIOUSLY, THE NEW BOOK AND MOVIE ABOUT WATERGATE ARE BOUND TO STIMULATE A REVIVAL OF CONSCIOUSNESS ABOUT THE AFFAIR. BUT IT SEEMS DOUBTFUL THAT AT THIS DATE THE AMERICAN PUBLIC WILL SEE THEM AS MUCH MORE THAN A POSTSCRIPT TO WATERGATE -- A FASCINATING AND CONTROVERSIAL POSTSCRIPT. BUT A POSTSCRIPT NONE THE LESS.

PCA/GH